

2001 Annual Report

Transportation Strategic Plan



December 2001

To the City Council and Seattle Citizens:

We are pleased to present the 2001 *Transportation Strategic Plan* Annual Report. We think you will find that it was a very productive year in the transportation arena.

This Annual Report details a variety of accomplishments. The year's most significant event may have been the State Legislature not adopting a comprehensive transportation package. We are hopeful that the 2002 Legislature will address this top priority – how to keep people and goods moving through our increasingly congested system and how to take care of our aging transportation infrastructure.

The February 28 Nisqually Earthquake brought home how important it is to make the necessary investments in the City's transportation infrastructure. Completion of Phase I of the Bridge Seismic Retrofit program in 2000 paid some clear and timely dividends and should spark an urgency to move forward on the partnerships and funding necessary to continue with Phase 2. Earthquake damage took the Alaskan Way Viaduct out of service for repairs many times during the spring, making us all aware of how critical it is that we choose and start building the Viaduct's replacement.

The City completed the West Galer Street Flyover ahead of schedule, opening up better access to a key portion of the industrial waterfront. We synchronized almost 200 of the City's traffic signals, making the best use of the infrastructure and technology already in place to keep people moving. And last January, the Transportation Blueprint was released as a menu of short and long-term strategies to better connect Seattle neighborhoods to each other as part of an integrated transportation network.

We are very proud of all that has been accomplished on transportation issues since the adoption of the *Transportation Strategic Plan* (TSP) in 1998. If we continue to follow the guiding strategies in the TSP, our city and region will reap the benefits of a healthy, vital transportation system.

Sincerely,

Anne Fiske Zuniga
Acting Director
Seattle Transportation

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Director
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What are the TSP and the TSP Annual Report?

In October 1998, the City of Seattle adopted the *Transportation Strategic Plan* (TSP), which outlines strategies and actions to help achieve the City's Comprehensive Plan goals: to make Seattle a city where streets and bridges are well-maintained, where transit, walking, and bicycling are convenient and attractive, and where we are less dependent on cars for our transportation needs. The TSP also aims to protect the character and livability of our neighborhoods, and to improve our ability to move freight and goods. The intent was that the TSP assist in long-range transportation planning and decision-making, and that it be an evolving and "living" document, updated regularly to ensure that it stays relevant. Since the TSP was adopted, Seattle Transportation (SeaTran) and Strategic Planning Office (SPO) staff have compiled two TSP Annual Reports to track the progress made in implementing the key TSP strategies. This Annual Report is the third.

While the Annual Report has changed format and design over the past few years, it maintains the goal of reporting to Seattle's citizens on the major accomplishments of important transportation programs and issues. With this year's report, staff again attempted to make the information accessible and interesting, while packing as much substance as possible within the pages. This year's Annual Report uses a map to illustrate where many of this year's improvements took place. To better tie the accomplishments to TSP strategies, many paragraphs end with a notation of the most relevant TSP strategy implemented in whole or in part.

Introduction

This past year brought challenges far broader and more complex than could have been expected. On February 28, the Nisqually Earthquake literally shook our region to its foundation and on September 11, our entire country entered into a new era of uncertainty brought on by terrorist attacks. The earthquake reinforced the importance of investment in basic infrastructure and long-term planning for natural disasters that may loom in the future. The September 11 tragedy continues to have repercussions, but one clear lesson is the need for vigilance where our key transportation corridors and lifelines are concerned.

On the mobility side, the 2001 version of the annual Texas Transportation Institute (TTI) mobility study ranked the Seattle-Everett area second worst in the United States for traffic congestion, using a measurement system based upon the amount of extra travel time incurred during the peak period compared to free-flowing travel. Because the study's parameters tend to highlight the regional aspects of congestion, they point to the importance of Seattle's involvement in a variety of regional forums and projects, from the TransLake Washington Study to Sound Transit. In addition, the TTI study supports Seattle's efforts to seek a variety of city-specific solutions to congestion, including aggressive traffic signal optimization, transit signal priority installation, low-cost solutions like the West Seattle Bridge bus-only lane, and innovative trip reduction projects such as car sharing and the Way to Go, Seattle! program.

This year was key for a number of major regional transportation projects. Sound Transit's Sounder commuter rail recently recorded its 500,000th passenger. At the same time, Sound Transit's Link light rail found itself over budget, and the Sound Transit Board approved a revised "starter" alignment that stretches from Convention Place Station in downtown Seattle to South 154th Street, about one mile north of the Sea-Tac airport. Construction is expected to begin in the summer of 2002. The Nisqually Earthquake caused significant damage to the Alaskan Way Viaduct, and repairs necessitated occasional closing of the Viaduct throughout the spring. This made clear the need for quick consensus on a replacement facility that is seismically sound, dependable, and can continue to serve as a key Seattle and regional north-south travel corridor. Finally, 2001 marked a solid year of work by the Elevated Transportation Company (ETC) to meet the voter-mandated timeline of bringing a ballot measure to Seattle voters by November 2002. ETC Board members and City staff worked together on routing and station location possibilities, and the coming year will bring more detail and some major decisions that could shape Seattle's transportation network for decades.

Just as the TSP contained an integrated set of comprehensive strategies for long-term transportation investments in Seattle, the Blue Ribbon Commission on Transportation's final report at the end of 2000 represented a historic effort by a diverse group of business, labor, public, and private representatives to craft a long-term state transportation strategy. Unfortunately, the 2001 Legislature was unable to reach agreement on a comprehensive transportation package.

Despite the peaks and valleys on those broader issues, a great deal was accomplished in transportation in 2001. By continuing to make strategic transportation investments, the City will be better able to preserve and maintain the transportation infrastructure, improve safety, and enhance mobility by providing more transportation choices.

Infrastructure Improvements

Operating and maintaining Seattle's existing \$7.6 billion transportation infrastructure is addressed in the *Transportation Strategic Plan* as the City's highest transportation priority. This infrastructure will continue to serve as the foundation for future improvements and growth. Major maintenance of the existing system, construction of new facilities, and the implementation of more transportation choices are all critical to a healthy, efficient transportation system. [TSP Priorities Chapter]

Seattle's existing system includes:

- 4,230 lane miles of streets
- 142 bridges
- 975 signalized intersections
- 2,000 miles of sidewalks and walkways
- 450 stairways
- 134 miles of bike trails, routes and lanes
- 1.6 million lane markers
- 30,000 City-maintained street trees
- 586 retaining walls and 5 seawalls
- 8,750 parking meters
- 4,700 crosswalks
- 750 traffic circles
- 120,000 signs

Every year, the City of Seattle invests tens of millions of dollars in projects intended to keep the city's transportation backbone functioning efficiently. In 2001, these projects included emergency earthquake repairs, upgrading and installing new traffic management devices, and repaving and reconstructing miles of City streets.

In 2001, SeaTran's Capital Improvement Program (CIP) was reviewed by the Dye Management Group to look for opportunities to improve project development and delivery. Overall, the study found that the department's program goals and priorities across different categories are clear and policy-driven. However, the study also made a number of recommendations, including the need for greater transparency in the prioritization of mobility projects, filling gaps between the planning process and the CIP prioritization process, and devoting additional time and resources to project scoping and cost estimation. SeaTran has already begun implementing a number of strategies as a result of the study and will continue to look for ways to integrate recommendations into future business practices.



Crews pave a portion of the 56 lane miles completed in 2001.